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ABSTRACT

As couples choose to have fewer children, to have their first child later in their adult life, or to remain childfree, there is growing interest in the antecedents of these fertility choices. To examine the hypothesis that couples who choose to remain childfree have less traditional sex-role orientations than couples who choose to become parents later in life, 20 expectant women, 20 voluntarily childfree women, and 34 of their husbands completed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, a measure of psychological masculinity and femininity. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the childfree and expectant groups with regard to demographic variables. Although the expectant women had higher Masculinity and lower Femininity scores than did the childfree women, t-tests revealed that the differences were not significant. Childfree men had higher Masculinity and lower Femininity scores than did the expectant fathers; again the differences were not statistically significant. There was a significant difference between men and women on the Femininity scale, but no significant sex differences on the Masculinity scale, suggesting that certain items on the Masculinity scale were being rated more highly by the women than would generally be expected. (NRB)

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The Relationship Between Masculinity and Femininity and Variant Childbearing Decisions

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The Relationship Between Masculinity and Femininity and Variant Childbearing Decisions

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Recently there has been increased variation in childbearing patterns. Couples are choosing to have fewer children, to have their first child later in their adult life, or to remain childfree. In light of this, there is growing interest in the antecedents of these fertility choices (Bram, 1978; Gerson, 1980; Smith, 1978) This paper presents findings on certain psychological antecedents of fertility decisions in delayed childbearers and voluntarily childfree couples.

Couples who choose to remain childfree have been found to be better educated, have a higher degree of labor force participation by women, have a higher income, and to be more egalitarian than couples who have their first child early in their adult lives (Bram, 1978; Feldman, 1981; Veevers, 1979). Census data suggests that couples who delay having their first child until after age 30 are demographically very similar to voluntarily childfree couples. However, Bram (1978) found that the childfree individuals in her sample were more individualistic and less tied to traditional sex role definitions than were individuals choosing to delay parenthood.

Traditionally, childbearing has been seen to be a confirmation of a woman's femininity or a man's masculinity and to be a significant contributor to their sense of identity. Feldman (1981) found that, although both parents and childfree individ-

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uals valued feminine traits for themselves, the childfree were significantly more likely to value masculine traits of achievement and independence. Similarly, the childfree wives in Bram's (1978) study were more likely to rate themselves as dominant and less likely to rate themselves as dependent; their husbands were less likely to rate themselves as competitive or dominant than were postponer or parental males.

It was expected, then, that one of the antecedent variables that would differentiate childfree individuals from those who have chosen to become parents later in their adult life would be psychological masculinity and femininity. It is hypothesized that childfree women would describe themselves in more traditionally masculine ways than would the expectant and that the childfree men would rate themselves as less traditionally masculine than would the expectant fathers.

Methods

Sample:

The sample consisted of 40 women, 20 expectant and 20 voluntarily childfree, and 34 of their husbands. There were no statistically significant differences between the childfree and the expectant groups. The average age of the childfree women was 33.16 years, the expectant, 33.20 years. The mean age of the childfree men was 35.18 and that of the expectant men was 33.77 years. Childfree couples had known each other an average

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of 10.72 years; the mean for the expectant was 9.31 years. Eighty-nine percent of the sample had college degrees; 65% of the females and 70% of the males had advanced degrees. All but five subjects were employed at the time of the study, mainly in professional, managerial, or executive positions.

The only statistically significant sex difference found was in regard to income. Even though there were no significant differences between men and women in educational or occupational achievement, more males than females were in the higher income categories, x^2 (5, 72) = 12.77, p = .05. Sixty-five percent of the men made over $20,000 a year, only 38% of the women did so.

Instrument and Procedure:

As part of a longitudinal study on fertility decisions and delayed childbearing, participants were interviewed individually and completed five paper and pencil questionnaires. Among these was Spence and Helmreich's (1978) Personal Attributes Questionnaire, a measure of pychological masculinity and femininity. The short form of this questionnaire is composed of three eight-item scales, Masculinity, Femininity, and a scale not employed in this study, the Masculinity-Femininity scale.

Results

T-tests revealed no significant difference between the childfree and expectant women on Masculinity (t = .99, df =38, p =.33) or Femininity (t = 1.51, df = 38, p = .14). However,

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the means for the expectant women were higher on the Masculinity scale and lower on the Femininity scale, the opposite direction of that predicted.

Similarly, there were no significant differences between the childfree and expectant men on the Masculinity and Femininity scales. Again, however, the direction of the difference was opposite that predicted. The childfree men had higher Masculinity scores than did the expectant. They also had somewhat lower scores on the Femininity scales than did the expectant men.

As is generally found, there was a significant difference between men and women on the Femininity scale (t = 3.08, df = 72, p = .003). However, contrary to what is usually found, there was no significant sex difference on the Masculinity scale, t = 1.09, df = 72 , p =.28).

Because it is unusual for there not to be significant sex differences on both the Masculinity and Femininity scales, it was anticipated that certain items on the Masculinity scale were being rated more highly by the females than would generally be expected. A series of two-way ANOVAS (sex by group) were done on the individual items on the Masculinity scale. There were no significant differences between males and females regarding Independence, Activeness, Competitiveness, or Persistence. Childfree women described themselves as less self-confident than the other three groups, F (1, 71) = 6.97, p = .01. Expectant women scored the highest on Dominance of the four groups, F (1,

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71) = 4.31, p .04.

There was a significant group difference in regard to standing up well under pressure with the expectant rating themselves higher than the childfree, F (1,71) = 6.71, p = .01. The only significant sex difference on the Masculinity scale was that men indicated they felt more superior than did women, F (1,71) = 5.42, p .02.

Implications and Conclusions

Taken together, the results of this study suggest that psychological masculinity and femininity are variables that elaborate our understanding of variant childbearing patterns, but in an unusual and unexpected way. Contrary to what might be expected from results of previous studies (Gerson, 1980; Greenglass and Borovilos, 1980) and our expectations, childfree women are not less feminine than their peers who choose to have children but delay doing so. However, the delayed childbearing women in this study have an unusually high mean on the Masculinity scale, higher even than the mean of the delayed childbearing men. What is impressive is that Spence and Helmreich indicated that "in all the U.S. samples we have tested, with the single exception of homosexuals, significant differences between the sexes in the predicted direction have uniformly occurred on all three scales (1978, p.120)."

It appears that it is not the childfree couples who differ as much as it is the delayed childbearing individuals. These

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findings seem more understandable when it is noted that the PAQ, as a measure, is designed to tap instrumental (Masculinity) and expressive (Femininity) orientations. Our thinking is that expectant women in this sample have to be not only self-confident, active, and instrumental enough to succeed occupationally, but must be unusually so to undertake the responsibilities of parenting in addition to the careers that they do not intend to relinquish. Because masculinity and femininity are reported to be "quite stable clusters of internalized traits" and the pattern of sex differences appears to be firmly established by age six (Helmreich, 1982), it is believed that these personality characteristics are antecedents of the childbearing decision.

One's choice of a parenting partner might also be influenced by perceptions of instrumental and expressive characteristics. Choosing a spouse who is relatively interpersonally oriented, as the expectant men's expressiveness scores indicated they are, might enhance the possibility that one's partner would be more inclined to participate in parenting. An extreme instrumental orientation on the part of these men might lessen the chance of this happening.

Findings supporting this interpretation are reported by Callan (1983) in a study dealing with partner selection in two groups of young, single women. One group consisted of women who had made an explicit decision not to have children; the other group was women who wanted to be mothers. Callan found that, in describing their ideal mate, the female respondents wanting

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children highlighted the need not only for a masculine partner, but also for one who presented "more stereotypically feminine attributes." Callan noted that possibly some consideration of the partner's future roles as father and caregiver may have influenced the women's ratings.

Our delayed childbearing women similarly seem to have chosen men who represent this type of ideal spouse - that is, having both masculine and feminine characteristics. The women seem to realize that their husbands are less traditionally masculine and this affects their thinking about childbearing issues. When asked whether her thinking about having or not having a child affected her choice of a partner, one expectant mother responded,

> I don't think consciously. I think unconsciously I knew he would make a wonderful father...he is very caring and giving and warm.

What is emphasized by this woman as important characteristics of a good father do not have to do with his instrumentality and ability to provide for the family, but rather with expressive characteristics.

The findings of this study shed new light on certain antecedents of variant childbearing decisions and are sugestive in regard to an elaboration of our understanding of the mate selection process. What might be more important, however, are the implications for the personality development of the children of these delayed childbearing couples. Because these children,

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both males and females, will have unique role models for integrating achieving and nurturing, we might expect to see developing individuals less constrained by the consequences of traditional sex-typing. Support for this expectation will come only as empirical studies are undertaken of children growing up in families that have made variant decisions regarding the timing of parenthood in their adult lives.

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Summary Statistics for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Femininity					
All Females	24.78	3.68	19	31	40
Childfree	25.35	4.25	19	31	20
Expectant	24.20	3.79	19	31	20
All Males	22.26	3.28	16	30	34
Childfree	22.18	3.73	17	30	17
Expectant	22.35	2.87	17	27	17
Masculinity					
All Females	20.75	4.67	13	30	40
Childfree	19.65	4.12	13	26	20
Expectant	21.85	5.03	14	30	20
All Males	21.88	4.18	15	31	34
Childfree	23.00	3.94	17	31	17
Expectant	20.77	4.24	15	31	17

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